



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Bill Wooton Takes Oath of Office as Supreme Court Justice

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – William R. “Bill” Wooton was sworn into office for a 12-year-term on the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia in a ceremony Wednesday, December 30, in the Supreme Court Chamber. He was elected June 9 to replace Justice Margaret Workman, who retires December 31, 2020. His term will begin January 1, 2021.

Because of COVID-19, the ceremony was webcast on the West Virginia Judiciary YouTube Channel.

“My aspiration as a Justice is to emulate the truly outstanding work of Justice Workman,” said Justice-Elect Wooton. “It’s an honor to join the Court.”

The oath of office was delivered by Justice John Hutchison, a fellow Raleigh County native, who said Justice-Elect Wooton is intelligent, easy to work with, and dedicated. “I am convinced that Bill will be a fantastic addition to the Court.”

Justice Workman told Justice-Elect Wooton: “Being a judge, the most important thing is to come on the bench with an open mind. When you come out here you are open to persuasion. When you go into the conference room it’s very important for each of the five Justices to listen to each other and respect each other.” The current court “has a lot of mutual respect and collegiality,” she said.

Justice-Elect Wooton served in the West Virginia Legislature for 26 years, in both the House of Delegates and West Virginia Senate. He was Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee for 10 years, during the time Chief Justice Tim Armstead was a member of the House Judiciary Committee. “Even though we didn’t always agree on things, we had a good working relationship and friendship. That will continue,” Chief Justice Armstead said.

Supreme Court Clerk Edythe Nash Gaiser read a letter from Robert B. King, Judge, U. S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, who has known Justice-Elect Wooton for almost 50 years. “I deeply regret I cannot be present,” he said. “Bill Wooton is the best of the best and has excelled at every endeavor.”

Russell Wooton, who has practiced law with his father for 15 years in Beckley, introduced him. Throughout his life, people at the West Virginia College of Law and across West Virginia have asked him to thank his father for his work on their behalf, Mr. Wooton said.

“During my father’s entire professional career, he has tried to serve the people of the state of West Virginia,” Mr. Wooton said. “He seemed to live with the philosophy that those with the ability to serve have a duty to do so.”

Justice-Elect Wooton said, “I am here because of my parents and especially my mother, because my father passed early. My sister and my brothers and I tried to treat everyone the way we wanted to be treated because mom lived the Golden Rule.”

He also credited his law school professors and his first boss, John A. Field, Jr., Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, for being inspirations for his lifetime of public service. Justice-Elect Wooton’s first job after law school was as Judge Field’s law clerk.

Justice-Elect Wooton also thanked everyone who helped him in his campaign, especially his family.

He said he is looking forward to working with all the current Justices, who he believes are committed to fairness, integrity, the rule of law and to following statutes as well as rules and norms of the judiciary.

Justice-Elect Wooton was educated in Raleigh County public schools. He received a bachelor’s degree in business management from Marshall University and a law degree from West Virginia University College of Law, where he was editor-in-Chief of the *West Virginia Law Review*, Order of the Coif, and graduated at the top of his class.

In addition to legislative service, he served more than thirty years in the United States Army Reserve and the West Virginia Army National Guard, where he retired as a Colonel. He was a longtime member of the Beckley Rotary Club and the Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce, and he has been a Beckley Little League coach.

He was an assistant West Virginia Attorney General from 1972 to 1974; and an Assistant Raleigh County Prosecutor from 1974 to 1977. He practiced law in Beckley with the firm Wooton, Wooton & Fragile from 1977 until 1994; with The Wooton Law Firm from 1994 until 2014; and with Wooton & Wooton, Attorneys at Law, from 2014 through 2020.

He is a permanent member of the Judicial Conference of the Fourth Circuit and is a West Virginia Bar Foundation Fellow.

He and his wife, Shir, have three adult sons and five grandchildren and live in Beckley. Their son, Robert, and grandchildren Bryce, Abby, Mya and Katelyn also attended the ceremony.

Justices Beth Walker and Evan Jenkins were not able to attend but sent their congratulations.

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